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"Drop In Any Time."

One of the pitfalls of friendship is the standing invitation. It is easy and pleasant to say: "Come whenever you like, my dear! We shall be delighted to see you at any time; don't stand on ceremony—come whenever you are this way." But let those who receive such invitations beware. It stands to reason that an unexpected visit cannot always be convenient—the hostess is in the midst of something or other and "not fit to be seen," or her husband has rushed home to take her out somewhere and she would rather go than stay at home and entertain her dearest friend, or the luncheon or the dinner is a makeshift—very nice, so far as the family is concerned, but not exactly suitable to set before visitors. The hostess tries to be nice, but can't help showing her vexation or embarrassment. The guest perceives something indefinable in the atmosphere and is accordingly constrained, and every one is uncomfortable. Yet people still go on giving and accepting standing invitations.—New York Tribune.

From Bad to Worse.

A gentleman was admiring his pigeons the other afternoon when he heard a curious "thud" and saw one of his birds drop from a window sill to the ground.

Turning round, the gentleman was just in time to see a small boy in the lane drop a catapult and run.

After a short chase the culprit was caught.

"You young scoundrel!" ejaculated the angry owner of the pigeon. "What do you mean by coming and shooting my birds?"

"Please, sir, I didn't mean to do it," whined the captive. "I—I didn't shoot at the pigeon."

"Come, come," said the gentleman, "don't make matters worse. I saw the bird fall, and if you did not aim at it how came you to hit it?"

"Please, sir," blubbered the boy, "the pigeon got in the way. I—I was aiming at the winder."—London Tit-Bits.

Boulevard and Esplanade.

Both "esplanade" and boulevard" are military terms by origin. The original "boulevard" was a bulwark or horizontal part of the rampart, and an "esplanade" was originally the glacis or slope of the counterscarp of a fortified place. A writer 200 years ago noted that the word boulevard was "now chiefly taken for the void space between the glacis of a citadel and the first houses of a town;" hence its extension to other "void spaces" suitable for promenading. The old French "esplanade" was defined by Cotgrave as "a planing, levelling, evening of ways," from Latin "explanare," to smooth or flatten out, whence the English words "explain" and "explanation."

Exact Reasoning.

Here is a bit of exact reasoning on the part of a little schoolgirl. The teacher wished to impress the idea of the wrong of idleness. He led up to it by asking who were the persons who got all they could and did nothing in return. For some time there was silence, but at last the little girl, who had obviously reasoned out the answer inductively from her own home experiences, exclaimed, with a good deal of confidence, "Please, sir, it's the baby!"

His Object.

"I can recommend you to a good lawyer."

"All right, but don't let him be too good. I'm trying to conduct my business so as to keep out of jail, not so as to go to heaven."—Houston Post.

The Start.

Judge—Were you present when the trouble started between the man and his wife? Witness—Yessir. I was at deir weddin', ef dat's whut yo' means, sah.—Philadelphia Bulletin.

The Only Safe Place.

"Can you lay this carpet so the children won't wear it out?"

"Where shall I put it, madam—on the roof?"—Harper's Bazar.

Oats were not known to the Hebrews or the Egyptians.

Girl Wanted? Read the Farmer Want Ads

A WOMAN'S ENCHANTMENT

By William Le Queux

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CHAPTER I.

The Man and the Mystery.

"Come, dear old chap, cheer up! It surely isn't so bad as all that!"

"Bad? It couldn't be worse! I'm ruined! But I'm not thinking so much about myself."

"I know, old fellow. You're thinking of her," I said in a low voice, deeply sympathizing with the man who sat there broken and dejected before me. "But how did it all happen? You're usually so very smart."

"Yes," replied Gough, bitterly; "I know I can be—too smart, perhaps, to suit some people. But I thought that fellow a gentleman, and trusted him!"

"Ah! few men are gentlemen when it comes to the obtaining of a concession which means a fortune," I remarked. "Garshore was no exception, it seems."

"He calls himself one," my friend said in a strained voice. "Fortunately I have never set myself up on a pedestal. I'm what the world calls by a hard name—an adventurer. I live by my wits, Phil," he went on, bitterly, speaking between his teeth, "and in the past I've lived well, and have had nothing to complain about."

"My dear old chap," I said, "you are no more of an adventurer than any other business man who spends his life abroad looking after concessions and openings for the employment of British capital in industrial enterprises. Half the millionaires in Park Lane are; at heart, adventurers, if the truth be told."

"Oh, yes, I know all about that!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "You're always trying to whitewash me. Why? Because, Phil, you're my best friend. If I get hard up for a pound I come to you."

"Well—and you've always paid me back, haven't you?"

"Yes. But you, in your position, may one day find it a bit awkward when it is known that we are such close friends. Supposing I was arrested one day?"

"Well, I hope you won't be, Granny. It won't come to that—I feel sure."

My friend shrugged his shoulders and tossed off his glass of liqueur brandy at a gulp.

"Who knows?" he exclaimed. "I'm broke now, Ralston, and I've lost Myra. Therefore let the future take care of itself. For myself, I have none—none."

"Rubbish!" I ejaculated with more force than politeness. "Myra you—loves you still. If you are just a little bit hipped, what does it matter? All will come right again before long, mark me. And if you want a few pounds to get along with, you know whom to ask, don't you?"

Granville Gough tossed away the end of his "Bogdanoff," his pet brand of Russian cigarette, without one of which he was scarcely ever seen, and stared straight before him across the great noisy well lit foreign cafe, the din and clatter of which almost drowned our conversation.

To the world he was a mystery. How he lived, or where he lived, nobody knew. About thirty-five, stout, broad-shouldered, good-looking, with fair hair which had an inclination to curl, a pair of big, merry blue eyes, and a big, clean-shaven face full of good humor and bonhomie "Granny" Gough was known in every capital of Europe. His full name was Gerald Granville Gough, hence his intimates called him "Granny." No man in the whole of Europe was more of a cosmopolitan, and surely no man more popular among a certain set—a rather go-ahead set, I freely admit.

In the bar of the Catham, in Paris, where Johnnie so ably presides; in that of the Grand at Stockholm, at the Angletree at Copenhagen, the Palast at Hamburg, the Hungaria at Budapest, the Grand at Belgrade, the Pera Palace at Constantinople, the Boulevard at Bucharest, or the Cecil in London, one had only to mention the name of "Granny" Gough to call forth a chorus of inquiries: "Where is the dear old chap—one of the very best! A bit of a crook, perhaps, but, by Jove, he never did a shady action toward a woman or a pal!"

His confession to me, which I have just related, took place one evening about eighteen months ago in a cafe in the little known Roumanian capital, Bucharest, where quite unexpectedly I had come across him again the smart but extremely expensive Hotel du Boulevard.

As fellow-cosmopolitans we had been friends for quite a number of years. Our first meeting, I remember, was in Brussels, at the Grand, long ago. He played a first-class game at billiards, and I wondered what could be his nationality. He spoke French, German, Norwegian and Italian with equal fluency, while his English had just the slightest tinge of American accent. A born cosmopolitan evidently, his smartness in dress was undeniably English, for only an Englishman can dress properly. Yet there was something about him that I put down as Scandinavian. Why, I cannot tell.

My first friendship with him arose from a curious circumstance. A cockney tourist accused him of cheating at cards. I was sitting at the table while they were playing, and on the accusation being made I defended Gough, with whom I had never until that moment spoken a word.

A quarrel ensued—a serious fracas indeed. The police intervened, but I took the part of the unknown and perhaps rather shady Englishman. I declared that he had not been guilty of cheating, and his friends and the police believed me.

Next day he called at my hotel, gripped my hand warmly, thanked me and added:

"I don't know you, sir. Perhaps you don't want to know me. But I like to meet a white man like yourself. You know nothing about me, and yet you were unprejudiced! Now it's over, I'll tell you the truth. I didn't cheat, but one of those curs did—the Frenchman. I spotted him and held my tongue."

"Why?"

"Because that young Londoner had talked so big an hour before, I thought it would teach him a lesson," he replied. "But," he went on "please understand that I don't put myself down as very straight. I get my money where I can—you understand? And I'm only here to thank you, and to assure you that Granny Gough never forgets a service."

Such was the beginning of a curious acquaintanceship—a friendship that has lasted through years. That Granny was an adventurer every cosmopolitan who reads this strange chronicle of events is well aware. Men who, like myself, knock about in odd corners of the continent know him well. They find him always immaculately dressed seated in a cane chair in the big courtyard of the Cecil in London today, and a week later he will be seen supping at Ciro's in Monte Carlo, at Capsa's in Bucharest or at the Hermitage in Moscow.

Dozens of times we met in the years following that first well remembered night in Brussels. His exterior was always that of the prosperous traveler, and his tips to servants were lavish. Sometimes it suited him—according to the business he was after—to be taken for a German, at other times as an Englishman, and frequently as an American.

In more than one capital his extravagance in living and his substantial tips to hotel servants, cabmen and the like earned for him the reputation of an American millionaire.

And it was as such I had now found him in that bright little capital of Roumania—Bucharest—the town of pretty women and of handsome men.

At the Hotel du Boulevard, one of the most chic on the continent, and where, as the gourmet knows, the steriet is always done to perfection, even better than at the Hermitage in Moscow, Granny Gough occupied a first-floor suite. His luggage consisted only of a hat box and a couple of suit cases.

There were rare occasions, he once confessed to me with a wink, when it became more convenient to abandon it than to pay his bill.

Indeed, so well known was he that in many of the best hotels in Europe he had only to walk into the bureau, announce his departure, and say:

"I'll pay when I come back again."

The proprietor, or manager, would bow, well knowing that if Granny gave his word to pay a bill he would do it even if years elapsed.

Though an adventurer pure and simple, he was curiously enough the very soul of honor. Meanness had no place within his heart. If he pitted his wits against sharp men of business and won, well—it was only what was done in the city every day. He never took advantage of a poor man and for any one in straits he always had ready a franc or two.

I had, however, never seen him so dejected as on this night.

He had, it seemed, been in Rumania for the past six months, endeavoring to obtain from the government a concession for a big American syndicate of some oil wells recently discovered at the foot of the Transylvanian Alps. By the expenditure in secret commissions of the greater part of the money he possessed he had brought the business up to the point where the concession was about to be signed by the minister of the interior.

For him this would mean a comfortable income for life and what was far more, marriage with that sweet-faced girl, scarcely out of her teens, whom he loved so truly and so well. Myra Stapleton lived at home in Yorkshire, the daughter of a small country squire, while her cosmopolitan lover traveled constantly over the face of Europe, scheming always to obtain sufficient funds to marry and with one goal in view, Myra—and honesty in the future.

I was one of the very few—perhaps indeed, the only person—who knew the truth of Granny's love romance. Myra, among other things, believed him to be a wealthy man, and fearing to lose her by undeceiving her, he had been compelled to sustain the fiction.

"Yes," he was saying in a low, hoarse vice, in tones I could scarcely hear amid the din and clatter of the cafe and the weird strains of the Tzigane band, "this means, Phil, that I've lost Myra. I must write and tell her—tell her the ghastly truth."

"Be patient, my dear old fellow," I urged. "Don't do anything rash! You've been in many a tight corner before, you know, and have always wriggled out. Why shouldn't you do so again."

"Because, to do this oil business I've not only spent every sou I possess, but I've also borrowed money which I can't repay," was his response.

"But you'll pay it some day. All your creditors trust you."

"Not for the amount I now owe."

"Tell me, Granny, how has all this come about?" I asked. "I know all that's passed between you and Myra. Recollect we were together when we first met her and her father."

"Ah, yes," sighed my friend. "I remember only too well. I loved her. Phil, from the very first moment we met. Old Stapleton believes me wealthy, otherwise he'd never have allowed me to pay court to his only daughter."

"He doesn't know you are secretly engaged—eh?" I asked.

"Certainly not. How could I, a mere adventurer, go to him."

"Don't use that word adventurer, Granny," I protested. "I don't like it."

"Well, it's the truth—and the truth is generally ugly!"

"But how did this fellow, Garshore, manage to get the concession over your head? Have you known him long?"

"About six months. Met him first in Berlin, at the Kaiserhof, and thought him a gentleman. He came here, we often went out together, and in response to his artful questions I, like a fool, told him what I was after. He said nothing, but a week later left Bucharest. In a month he was back again. He'd been over to America in the meantime and returned as agent of a big group in New York and with a substantial credit at the Bank of Roumania. While posing as my friend and going out with me every evening, he was working against me in secret—working in a low-down way."

'How?"

"By bribing a lady friend of the Minister Soutzo— a lady who he found was becoming rather obnoxious to his excellency. The person in question went yesterday to the minister it appears, and told him that if the concession were signed in Garshore's favor she would sign an agreement to leave Roumania at once—and never return."

"And that's what has happened?" I remarked, surprised.

"Exactly. Garshore has his concession and I'm left out in the cold. I suppose, Phil, I'm a fool," he added. "I knew the woman had influence over his excellency, and I could, had I wished, have acted exactly the same as he has done, and made a clear sixty thousand pounds by it."

"No, Granny," I said, "you're not a fool. You tried to do the business honestly and uprightly, and you failed, as many a good man fails, by endeavoring to run straight. But depend upon it his money won't benefit him very much."

"No. I suppose it won't, after all," my friend said reflectively. "She's a clever woman is Lydia Popescu. Garshore fancies he's played his game well, no doubt, but he doesn't know the pretty Lydia—as I do."

"Oh! tell me about her. I'm interested." I urged.

But the broken man shook his head, remained silent, and slowly lit another of his pet Bogdanoffs.

CHAPTER II.

'Mid London's Lights.

A fortnight had gone by.

I, Philip Ralston, found myself back again in dear, dirty old London. My pied-a-terre—when I was not traveling—was on the hub of the universe, for, to be exact, I had a tiny flat, consisting of a sitting room, bedroom, bathroom and a cupboard-like apartment called a kitchen, in Talbot House, St. Martin's Lane—within a stone's throw of Charing Cross.

Though a thoroughbred cosmopolitan, like my friend Granny Gough, I was a Cockney, born and bred. My father, a city merchant, had, on his death, left me with a comfortable income, and for a good many years I had spent my life in erratic journeyings to and fro between the channel and the Urals.

It was a warm July night, and I was seated with Granny in one of those cane armchairs in the courtyard of that colossal hotel, the Cecil, in the Strand. He was smoking in dejection, watching idly the coming and going of the thousand or so guests, mostly strangers in London.

To be Continued.)

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